

SPEECH
OF THE
HON. J. R. GIDDINGS, OF OHIO,
ON
THE COMPROMISE MEASURES.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MARCH 16, 1852.

The House having resolved itself into Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union on the Deficiency Bill, (Mr. MEADE, of Virginia, in the chair)—

Mr. GIDDINGS said:

For the manner in which these political questions are now precipitated upon the House I feel no responsibility. From the commencement of our session I have endeavored, so far as able, to guide the business of this body in the regular and appropriate channels marked out by our predecessors in the earlier and better days of the Republic. I endeavored, by all the influence I could command, to take up the President's message in the first months of the session. On examining that document, all parties could have brought forward their views. I will also add, that I regretted to hear the gentleman from Georgia, who has just taken his seat, boast in this Hall of the price of human flesh at the South. It appeared to me that, this was not the place for such declarations.

Sir, on the morning of the first day of this session, one of the great political parties of this body, in caucus assembled, resolved to sustain the Compromise measures of the late Congress. The other, assembled in like manner, laid similar resolutions on the table. The support of these measures was a subject of agitation and discussion, before we had proceeded so far as even to ballot for a Speaker; and few days of the entire session have passed, in which a portion of the time has not been occupied by such agitation.

The Compromise I understand to consist of a series of laws, enacted by the late Congress, consisting, first, of the law which admits California as a State. The object of that bill being accomplished, no attempt to disturb it will of course be made. Secondly, that which defines the boundaries of Texas. This, too, has accomplished its object, and is therefore settled, and no longer a subject of controversy. The others, establishing Governments in our Territories, including the slave-breeder's of Maryland and Virginia from the slave markets of this District, and that for the recapture of fugitive slaves,

are in operation—subject, like other statutes, to modification or repeal. But it is said that all questions of slavery were settled by the passage of these laws; that they are to operate as a final *quietus* of the whole slavery agitation. These ideas were not advanced in this body at the time those bills were passed. Indeed, if my recollection be correct, there was no discussion upon the passage of the fugitive law, or the laws establishing Governments in Utah and New Mexico. They were passed under the previous question, without examination. Few members of that Congress, I think, entertained the absurd notion that their action could bind the action of gentlemen now present. Few members from the free States, who voted for these measures, have survived the storm of popular indignation, brought upon themselves by the passage of those laws. Their successors were sent here for the very purpose of repealing these enactments; and I am of opinion that it will require strong argument to convince them that the reprehensible conduct of their predecessors is to control and govern this Congress.

I am aware that men in high official stations have announced to the country that the slave questions are settled—that all agitation has ceased. But what are the facts? We see and know that discussion has increased and extended more rapidly since the enactment of those laws than at any former period.

Our elections are very generally made to depend on the slave question. It has placed new and able members in the Senate, and it has driven others into retirement. It has occasioned great changes in this body. Where now are the Northern members who advocated these Compromise measures? Gone, sir, most of them, to that land of political forgetfulness from which they will never return. What questions entered into the late contest in New Hampshire? What were the issues in Massachusetts at her late autumnal election? What has occasioned the political revolution in Ohio? These elections turned upon the question of slavery. And while on this point, I would ask what has blasted and withered the last politi-

cal hopes of the present Secretary of State? Every man knows that it is this very question of slavery. While he has been writing letters and making speeches to demonstrate that the slave agitation had ceased, it was operating in the popular mind, was silently stealing his political breath, and has now pronounced the sentence of death to his political hopes. In most of our elections for State and county officers, it is rapidly becoming the principal disturbing element. The people in some portions of the country will not confide in those who are the advocates of freedom, in other parts they will confide in no other.

The institution of slavery has increased its victims, in sixty years, from six hundred thousand to *three millions*.

The slave States, early finding themselves unable to hold their bondmen in subjection, called on the Federal Government to assist them in recovering their fugitives from their neighbors, the Indians. Without discussion, or, so far as we know, without obligation, the Executive power, then as usual in slaveholding hands, efflored a treaty providing for the return of fugitive slaves to their masters. This constituted a precedent. Another similar treaty followed. The Indians failed to live up to their stipulations. The sending of their fellow men back to chains and bondage was a barbarity at which they revolted. At length the first Seminole war ensued. Then the second; and untold millions of the people's money was squandered in returning them to bondage.

Slavery and the slave trade, in this District, was established early in the present century; and in a few years thereafter, Congress established the coastwise slave trade. As the institution increased, more slave territory was demanded. Louisiana was purchased; then Florida. Texas was annexed. War with Mexico followed, and vast territory was acquired. Three million slaves could not be held in bondage by the power of the slave States. We were called on to permit the institution to be extended into our Territories; we did so: to give free territory to Texas; and we did it: to pay her for territory which our arms had conquered; and we did it: to take upon the nation the burden of capturing and returning fugitive slaves; to appoint officers, or slave-catchers, in all parts of the free States; to subject the citizens of the North to the expenses and disgrace of chasing down the hunted fugitive, as he flies from a land of chains, and sighs and bitter tears. The people of the free States have witnessed these things. They know them to be unconstitutional—violations of their rights—inhuman, and barbarous. They, of course, understand that the remedy is with themselves, and they are endeavoring to cast these burdens from them. *And they will do it.*

Looking forward, as all reflecting men must, we see that in sixty years more we shall have

20,000,000 slaves in the United States—a greater number than our present white population. Now, sir, if this Federal Government is to take upon itself the burden and expense of holding that vast number of human beings in bondage; if we are to appoint officers to catch all who shall hereafter attempt to regain their freedom, and to pay the expenses of returning them to bondage; if we are to provide territory for them, and to maintain slave markets for such a population, we shall find ourselves involved in business which may well occupy our whole time at no distant day.

For three years past, this body has done very little except to legislate for slavery. But what else can it do, when that institution shall be three times as great as it now is? Sir, this agitation will increase as slavery increases, unless this Government shall respect the constitutional rights of the free States, and relieve them from the burdens, the disgrace, and the crimes, of that institution.

I have so often discussed the constitutional rights of the several States respecting slavery, that I now feel no disposition to repeat the doctrines on which I base my political action; but I may be permitted to say, that Congress has no more right to bestow its energies for the support of the slavery of the South, than it has to sustain their banks, their railroads, or their system of apprenticeship, or the laws of those States respecting minors, or those which regulate the rights of husband and wife. Slavery, with all these subjects, are matters which each State should regulate for itself, and with which this Government has no right to interfere, and with which we cannot interfere, except at the expense of the constitutional rights of the North.

To this view of our constitutional obligations, both the great political parties of the nation are committed. I need only quote the resolution of this House in December, 1833, which is in the following words:

"That this Government is a Government of limited powers, and that, by the Constitution of the United States, Congress has no jurisdiction whatever over the institution of slavery in the several States of this Confederacy."

This resolution was introduced by a distinguished Democratic member, and was sustained by a vote of 198 yeas to 6 nays; nearly every member of both parties voting for it. The Baltimore platform contains resolutions substantially embracing this doctrine; and now the entire Democratic party of the nation stands pledged before the world to maintain this important right of the people of each State, to maintain just such an attitude, in regard to slavery, as to them shall appear just and reasonable. Such, too, were the positions of the Whig party, generally, up to the passage of the Compromise measures, to which I have referred. Indeed, the Whigs were more

strongly committed to this policy than were the Democrats. The free Democracy at Buffalo adopted this great leading principle of State Rights, as the basis of their organization. But the distinction which marked that party as separate from both the others was, and still is, a determination to bring into practice this important doctrine, upon the maintenance of which the liberty and the rights of the people depend; while both the other parties have, practically, deserted their professed and avowed principles.

To the maintenance of the Compromise measures as a *final settlement* of the slave question, the President, in his message, exhorts the people to adhere. The Whig and the Democratic parties are each striving to go beyond the other in their devotion to this plan for silencing all further agitation of the questions of liberty and slavery. The Whigs, at the commencement of this Congress, apparently got the start of their competitors in servility. They passed resolutions, pledging their party to the support of the Compromise. And here, in this Hall, certain leading members publicly boasted of the fact, before we had even commenced the election of our officers. I do not say that the whole Whig party were present at the caucus, but the act has gone forth as the act of the party. Those individuals who were present evidently thought that servility to the Slave Power was the only means of securing political success. But we are given to understand, by leading Democrats and by the press of that party, that their National Convention will do that which their Congressional caucus refused to do, by passing resolutions, pledging their party and their candidate to maintain the Compromise measures. On the other hand, we are now told that the Whigs will play dark; that they will make no avowal of principles, but will select as their standard-bearer a gentleman of acknowledged military renown; will spike his cannon, take the flints from their own muskets, and go forth to the conflict without music, but with the silence of a funeral.

And now, Mr. Chairman, the question comes home to every elector of this nation; to every man, woman, and child, whether bond or free. *What will be the effect of maintaining the Compromise?* What the effect of silencing further agitation of the slave question? These are important inquiries, which, as yet, have never been answered; nor have they been discussed in this body.

The first consequence resulting from the support of the Compromise will be to *maintain slavery and the slave trade in this District.*

As already observed, in 1801, Congress passed a law, by which the institution of slavery in this District, with its attendant commerce in human flesh, was continued and established under Congressional enactment. That law remains in force to this day. Here, sir, under

our own observation, within our own jurisdiction, by virtue of our own laws, man is degraded, robbed of his intellectual enjoyments, kept in deplorable ignorance, and disrobed of his manhood. By virtue of those laws he is transformed into a chattel, brutalized, and sold like swine. Here, sir, men and women are bred for market. Beings in human shape follow the business of rearing boys and girls for sale; and by that business sustain themselves and families, and accumulate wealth.

To sustain the Compromise is to sustain this revolting practice—to give these slave-breeders license and encouragement to pursue an occupation abhorrent to every feeling of Christianity and of decency. Yet, sir, the Whig members of this body, on the first day of our session, resolved, distinctly and emphatically, to support this practice, which is spurned and held in disgust by Mohammedan Governments. I wish to be understood, and therefore repeat, that the support of the Compromise measures is identified with and inseparable from the support of slave-breeding and slave-dealing, now carried on in this District. To sustain the Compromise is to sustain these practices. To prohibit the slave trade here would violate this pretended Compromise. It is required, I understand, of each of the Democratic candidates for President, that he shall sustain the Compromise, and thereby lend his whole official influence to uphold and encourage the breeding and sale of slaves in this District. Unless pledged to this, he cannot receive the support of that party; while the Whig candidate is to say nothing about it, to express no opinion in regard to it, to stand neutral upon the subject. To stand neutral, to do nothing, is to lend an influence in favor of this growing human flesh for market. This traffic in the bodies of females depends on the voice of Congress. If we say stop, it ceases forever; if we are silent, it continues. To remain supinely silent, is to continue it.

Now, I do not think there is a member on this floor from a free State who dare speak out boldly and say to this House and to the country that he is in favor of this breeding of mankind for market, that he approves of this traffic in God's image. If any member from the free States should do it, I think it would seal his political fate. Yet gentlemen do not hesitate to rise here and declare their intention to support the Compromise, thereby lending their entire influence to sustain this business of breeding human cattle for the shambles. I respectfully ask the gentleman from New York, [Mr. Brocks,] who first publicly swore allegiance to this Compromise, whether he is in favor of sustaining this traffic in human flesh? I desire to understand the position of gentlemen, and hope they will stand up manfully and avow their doctrine and their policy. I therefore respectfully ask the gentleman to say what he

will do in regard to this slave trade? Will he vote to continue or to abolish it? I await his answer.

Inasmuch as that gentleman remains silent, I respectfully ask any other Northern man, who sustains the Compromise, to say whether he is willing to sustain this traffic in human flesh? I repeat, that I understand the Compromise to embrace this slave trade; that if we sustain the Compromise we must sustain this traffic. And I desire to see gentlemen stand up, like honest, honorable men, like the Representatives of freemen, and avow their sentiments; and if there be a Northern member who will avow himself in favor of this traffic, in the face of this House and of the country, I desire to hear him, and I await a response.

But, inasmuch as I have been addressing Whigs more particularly, I will also inquire of gentlemen on the other side of the House on this point. I noticed the letter of the gentleman from New Hampshire to his constituents, alluded to by the gentleman who preceded me. I understand that he considered himself pledged to support the Compromise. I should like to know whether he will sustain the slave trade in this District?

Mr. HIBBARD. I voted for the bill of the last Congress abolishing the slave trade in the District of Columbia. That vote explains my views on that subject. If the gentleman wishes to know whether I would vote for a bill abolishing slavery in the District, or the trade between the people of the District, I answer that I should vote against it. I am opposed to the further agitation of the subject.

Mr. GIDDINGS. I thank the gentleman for his frankness. I understand him, and the country understands him. I was mistaken in supposing there was no man from a free State who would sustain this commerce in the bodies of women and children. But I like to see a man bold, even in his iniquities. I have more respect for the gentleman who thus says what he will do, than I have for members who refuse to speak, but cast their votes and exert their influence to maintain this slave trade. I presume the gentleman honestly represents the views of his people, that they approve of this breeding of men and women for market.

But the Compromise embraces also the slave trade upon our Southern coast. All are aware that, by the ninth section of the act of 1807, slave dealers are authorized to carry (under certain regulations,) slaves from one port of the United States to another, under the flag of our Union. Men, women, and children, are purchased in this District, and in the Northern slave States, and placed on board these slave ships and carried to the torture and premature deaths, which, it is well known, await them upon the cotton and sugar plantations. There they are murdered under a slow torture by the lash of inhuman overseers. It is estimated

that twenty thousand human victims are thus annually sacrificed to Southern barbarity. The blood of those victims rests upon the members of this body. We have the power to stop this flood of human gore. But, while these victims toil in chains, and sigh and weep under the tortures to which our law consigns them, members here refuse to examine this subject, refuse to permit the introduction of a bill to repeal this law; but they stand here and exert their utmost powers to revive, to galvanize into life, the old party issues on which they have heretofore contended. They endeavor to close their eyes to notorious facts, and soothe their consciences by occupying their own attention, and that of others, upon the miserable party conflicts, which have no higher motive or aim than to secure the spoils of office to one or the other political party. I judge not for others, but so far as I am myself concerned, I should feel far less guilt were I to strike a stiletto to the heart of a single victim, than I should to exert my influence to sustain that slave trade, or than I should were I to sit here in silence and permit that infamous traffic to continue without my solemn protest against it. It is frequently the case, that men and women, apparently doomed to the tortures of the far South by this trade, commit suicide rather than meet its horrors. All will recollect the story of the father, mother, and children, confined in a slave prison in a neighboring State, destined to the Southern market. The parents, having deliberated upon their situation, and that of their children, took the lives of their own offsprings, and then sought death by their own hands. Do not we who sit in this Hall, and by our silence and inaction continue this slave trade, share in the guilt of those dark and damning iniquities? Does not the blood of those victims stain our garments? And, when we appear at the bar of final retribution, shall we plead this Compromise as a justification for crimes which would strike terror to a savage heart? I am aware that some of my colleagues have pledged themselves to sustain these Compromise measures, thereby upholding this slave trade. Now, sir, I wish to inquire of those gentlemen whether they are willing to rise on this floor, and say frankly to the people of our State, that they are in favor of supporting this slave trade? I desire a full and fair understanding on this subject. I wish to understand the position of the Whig party of my own State. Will they sustain this coast-wise slave trade, or will they not? or are they to play dark and keep silent? I mean no disrespect to my colleagues of either party. I am solicitous that the people of Ohio should understand how each of their representatives stands on these questions.

The people of the North have been deceived long enough by politicians, who proclaim their intention to sustain the Compromise, without descending to particulars and explaining what

they mean by such support. Indeed, gentlemen dare not avow their intention to sustain the slave trade in this District upon our Southern coast, and in our Territories, and to maintain the infamous fugitive slave law. It was a truism uttered by my Lord Coke, when he said, "frand lurketh in generalities." This general expression in favor of sustaining the Compromise embraces all these iniquities; and when a man, either here or elsewhere, avows himself in favor of the Compromise measures, he, in substance and fact, avows himself in favor of breeding men and women for market in this District and in our Territories, and of prostituting our flag to the protection of a commerce in human flesh. I would be as willing to traffic in God's image, as I would to sustain the owner of yonder slave prison in his accursed vocation, by upholding the law which authorizes him to pursue it. I would as soon vote for Williams, the slave dealer and owner of yonder barracoen, to the office of President, as I would for any man who sustains him in his execrable commerce. Yet, sir, strange as it may seem, your Presidential candidates of the Democratic party appear to think they will have no chance of success unless they patronize those worse than savage practices, while the Whig candidate is to keep silence in regard to them.

But the Compromise was intended also to, and, if observed, must, forever, close all hope of excluding slavery or the slave trade from our Territories. On this point there is no longer uncertainty. The official returns from Utah show that slavery exists there. Servile politicians can no longer deny the fact. The honorable Secretary of State, I think, will not repeat that gigantic falsehood which he put forth in the Senate on the 7th of March, 1850, when he asserted that slavery was "excluded from that country by the laws of God." Indeed, at the time when that attempt to deceive the people of the North was made, it was known here and throughout the country that slavery existed in Utah. The fact had been published some two months previously in most of our leading newspapers; and if the author of that declaration was ignorant of the fact, I think he was the only member of Congress uninformed on that point. Slavery also exists in New Mexico, as we have seen by the public press. Indeed, if we can rely upon the public press, a Judge of New Mexico was lately engaged in purchasing slaves in this city to work the silver mines of that country, from which the Secretary of State asserted that slavery was excluded by God's law.

Now, if the Compromise be sustained, then are these Territories to be delivered over to the curse of slavery. The soil which, under Mexican law, had been consecrated to freedom, is now, under American law, to be cursed with the most degrading oppression that exists upon earth; and slave markets are to be established,

and men bought and sold, and women made the subjects of purchase and sale, on territory conquered by our arms. To sustain the Compromise, is to sustain slavery and the slave trade in those Territories. To vote for Presidential candidates who uphold the Compromise, is to vote for slavery, for the slave trade, with its attendant crimes, to continue in those Territories.

Mr. Chairman, when I hear members on this floor rise and proclaim their intention to support the Compromise, I understand them to say emphatically, that they have made up their minds to support slavery in this District and in the Territories; and to maintain the slave trade, with all its crimes and frightful amount of guilt, here, and in the Territories, and on our Southern coast. If gentlemen mean anything by their declarations, they mean this. When they say the slave question is settled, they intend to be understood by Southern men as giving their influence in favor of maintaining slavery and the slave trade, wherever they now exist under the laws of the Federal Government. I desire the people of the North to understand them. I rose to speak for this purpose. I ever have been, am now, and trust I ever shall be, hostile to political deception and double-dealing. I desire to see gentlemen maintain their opinions at home and in this Hall. I have no respect for that man who will hold one set of doctrines before the people at home, and then lend his influence to overthrow them in this Hall. The people have no respect for such men; nor do I believe that such men have respect for themselves.

Mr. Chairman, who that held a seat in this Hall during the last and present Congress, could listen to the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. RANTOUL,] who spoke so frankly and so ably a few days since, and help comparing that speech with the conduct of a certain honorable member from the same State, who, in the last Congress, fled from the Hall in dismay, rather than to give a vote on a pending question, lest that vote would show his constituents and the country his position on the slave question. I care nothing for political names. The people will look at the *man*, and compare him with the *servile*. All men, of whatever party, must approve the course of him who frankly avows his sentiments; and all must pity him who has not the moral courage to give a vote where slavery is involved.

Sir, I would commend to our Whig friends the example of the gentleman from the old Bay State, who recently spoke so boldly on this question. I greatly desire to see gentlemen on this side of the Hall speak as boldly as he did. I know there are some who hold the same sentiments. I hope they will not hesitate to express them. And I also desire to see all who hold that it is our duty to maintain the Compromise, to lend our influence to the sup-

port of slavery and of the slave trade, come forth, and say so manfully, as becomes men who represent an enlightened people. This expression of our honest sentiments is due to the people; it is due to ourselves. We have been pained at exhibitions of tergiversations here; at the exposure of gentlemen who hold to manly sentiments of freedom at home, and when they once get here, turn round and swear allegiance to slavery. There is no excuse for this deception. If our constituents desire us to act for slavery, let us do it openly and boldly. If they wish us to maintain the cause of freedom, let us do it manfully, or resign our seats in this body; but let us not deceive those who honor us with their confidence.

Again, sir, by maintaining the Compromise, we shall uphold the fugitive law, with all its infamous and unconstitutional provisions. The constitutional provisions in regard to fugitives from labor have been so often argued by me, that I will not, on the present occasion, repeat my views. I will only say that a proposition to involve the people of the free States in the expense and disgrace of arresting and imprisoning fugitive slaves, was offered to the Convention that framed the Constitution; that the proposal was objected to; and so strong were the objections, that the member who offered it withdrew it, not daring to take a vote of the Convention. We are all aware that on that occasion no member expressed the opinion that the people of the free States were bound by that instrument, or by any moral or political principle, to participate in the expense or the disgrace of capturing fugitive slaves. We know, historically, that it was the intention of the framers of that instrument to do no more than to secure to the master the same right to pursue and capture his slave in a free State, that he possessed to pursue and capture his horse or mule. That the latter part of this provision, which says "he shall be delivered up on claim of the person to whom such service or labor may be due," renders it our duty to deliver up the slave, as we deliver up the stray horse or mule, on claim of the owner. We are not to obstruct the master in reclaiming him. This was the view expressed by the Supreme Court, in the case of *Prigg vs. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*.

This is perfectly consistent with the views of the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. RANTOU,] who, I think, has taken the ground entertained at the time the Constitution was adopted by the people in their several State Conventions. But, for the sake of the argument, I will go beyond him, and admit that Congress possesses the right to legislate so far as to secure the owner in the exercise of this right; that we may, by legislation, punish any person who interferes with that privilege, either by making such interference penal, or giving a

compensation to the owner. This was the view evidently entertained by the Congress of 1793. They endeavored to effect this object; but there they stopped. They made no attempt to involve this Government, or the people of the free States, in the burdens, expense, and disgrace, of catching and sending the trembling fugitive back to bondage.

Here, sir, at this precise point, I take issue upon the constitutionality of that portion of the law of 1850 which imposes upon this Government the burden, expense, and disgrace, of chasing down the flying bondman, and sending him back in chains.

Those portions of the law which authorize and require the appointment of officers to grant process for the arrest of slaves; that part which makes it the duty of judges to grant such process; that part which directs marshals and deputy marshals to arrest the slave; which authorizes them to call on the people to assist in that piratical work; which renders it penal for a man to feed a famishing or starving fugitive, by which he shall be strengthened and enabled to pursue his flight—these provisions are each of them unconstitutional, unjust, abhorrent to the principles and the feelings of the people of the free States, inhuman, and barbarous.

Mr. Chairman, it has pleased certain gentlemen, on various occasions, to allude to myself and my political friends as *opposed* to the Constitution. They will not meet our arguments on this point. They recoil from legitimate debate, and seek to misrepresent us by general charges, carefully avoiding every specific point. I now repeat, that to the full extent to which the law of 1850 involves this Government, its officers, and the people of the free States, in the burden, the expense, and disgrace, of recapturing and returning fugitive slaves, it is *unconstitutional*.

And, sir, I here desire to understand if there be a member from Ohio, or from any free State east of it, who denies this position? Is there one who holds that his constituents and himself are bound to participate in the expense and crime of chasing slaves? If so, I desire that he will announce the fact. I long to find one such public man; and if there be one here, I wish he would avow the fact.

No, Mr. Speaker, I blush for my country, when her representatives take shelter behind unmeaning generalities, and refuse to avow their honest sentiments.

If gentlemen intend to support the Compromise, they must of course intend to chase down the trembling female, as she flees from the inhumanity of a worse than savage oppressor. And, in view of some men, no candidate is fit for President, or other office, unless he is willing thus to degrade himself in view of those who regard with sentiments of respect the dignity of the human race.

Mr. Chairman, we are under neither moral

nor political obligations to legislate on this subject. The first clause of the same section of the Constitution provides that "the citizens of each State shall enjoy all the privileges and immunities of citizens of the several States." Now, sir, instead of carrying out this provision of the Constitution, by legislating for its enforcement, we have left the subject as it was when the Constitution was adopted. And instead of enforcing this provision, we permit Southern States now to sell the citizens of Massachusetts into slavery; and hundreds of native born American citizens have by those States been seized and sold into slavery, in plain, direct, and palpable violation of the Constitution, and are now bowing under the lash; while members of this body from the same States do not even refer to such outrages upon liberty and humanity, but are eager to rise and swear allegiance to this fugitive law; avowing their readiness to chase down a fellow being who seeks an asylum from oppression. How long will the people tolerate such callousness, such insensibility to all that is right, and just, and patriotic?

Mr. Chairman, for sixty years this construction of the Constitution which I have expressed has been acknowledged and observed. During that period, no statesman advanced the ad-hoc doctrine of subjecting the laboring men of the North to the disgrace of catching slaves. The history of our Government shows this fact, and coming ages will read it. This law which takes from the laboring men of the North a portion of their earnings, to pay for catching and returning fugitive slaves, is a thousand times more repugnant to their feelings than was the stamp act, or the tax on tea. Under this law, they are involved in supporting an institution which they detest; compelled to contribute to the commission of a crime abhorrent to humanity. This oppression, this violation of conscience and of their constitutional rights, this tyranny, they feel and deprecate. It is impossible that an intelligent—a patriotic—people can long be subjected to such violations of their rights and the rights of humanity. The conscience of the nation cannot be long separated from its Government. It will be in vain for navy-yard chaplains to deliver lectures, and write essays, to convince our people that it is their duty to uphold the slave trade and the fugitive law. It will be in vain for "ministers of the lower law," to preach up the duty of Christians to commit crimes against God and humanity, at the contemplation of which our very natures revolt. The voice of reason and of conscience will find utterance. The escape of Shadrach at Boston, the just and holy manifestation of the popular mind at Syracuse, the merited death of Gorsuch at Christiana, should teach the advocates of the fugitive law, and of the Compromise, that the "higher law" of our natures, dictated by God, and imprinted upon

the hearts of a Christian people, will eventually set these barbarous enactments at defiance. The shooting slaves in the mountains of Pennsylvania, the inhuman murder of a fugitive in Indiana, as stated in the public papers, could not fail to be followed by the resistance to which I have referred.

The slaves, as already stated, are to increase; the number of fugitives will of course increase more rapidly. Our railroads, steamboats, and the vast increase of intercommunication between our free and slave States, cannot fail to carry knowledge, and intelligence to the whole colored population, North and South. With them there must be hostility and hatred towards their oppressors, whether they be slaveholders, or the allies of slavery. It is a law of the human mind. All honest men must unite in the acknowledgment of their rights. It is our duty to carry intelligence to every being who bears the image of our Creator. Thousands of agencies are at work, bearing information to the oppressed and down-trodden of our land.

By an inscrutable law which pervades the moral world, our very efforts to sustain slavery are converted into the means of its overthrow. The slave trade in this District is upheld for the purpose of sustaining slavery in our Southern States. But where is the reflecting man, who does not see that every slave sold from this city carries with him intelligence of his rights, and becomes a missionary of freedom when transferred South? Why, sir, in that mournful procession of fifty-two victims of this infamous commerce, taken from this city in 1848, was an individual of unusual intellect. His name was Edmonson. He called on me at different times to aid him in raising money to redeem his sisters. They were, however, sold, and subsequently repurchased by some benevolent people at the East, and are now free. I am told that his whole family were endowed with intellects of the highest order. He was himself, so far as propriety of language, gentlemanly deportment, and intelligence, are concerned, not the inferior of gentlemen here, or of the President of the United States. But he was a victim to this slave trade; and unless he now sleeps in a servile grave, he is preparing the minds of Southern slaves for that work which lies before them; a work which, if not accomplished by the voice of truth and justice, will be perfected in blood. That, too, is the case with every fugitive slave who is returned to bondage. The whole Northern slave population are becoming intelligent. They read, or hear read, the discussions of our Northern press. They learn what is said in this Hall. The remarks I am now making will reach the ears of many thousands who are borne down by oppression. To them I say, "*All men are created equal*;" "*you are endowed by your Creator with an inalienable right to liberty*;" and

I add the words of one of Virginia's noblest sons, "GIVE ME LIBERTY, OR GIVE ME DEATH."

Mr. Chairman, the day of redemption for this people *must come*. No human power can prevent it. All reason, philosophy, and history, demonstrate the approach of that day. Look at the British West Indies. There the Africans for centuries labored under the scourge; they clanked their chains; they toiled and wept under the hand of oppression. But they increased in numbers, as do the slaves of our Southern States. Their oppressors became enervated by indolence and luxury, while the slaves increased in numbers, in knowledge, and in power, precisely as do the slaves of this land, sarcastically called a land of *freedom*. They became an expense to their Government, as do ours. That expense increased, as ours does, until the Government had no other course than to purchase them and set them free. The same result is intended by those who now advocate the Compromise, which is nothing more nor less than an attempt to throw the burden of sustaining slavery upon this Federal Government. As was well remarked by the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. RANTOUL,] it is a *Federal* measure, a centralizing measure, calculated to concentrate power in this Government, and to destroy the influence of the States. The plan has often been hinted, and this day it is more than hinted, in the leading organ of the Administration of this city. This grand scheme will subject the nation to a debt of \$1,200,000,000—a debt one-third greater than that of England—a debt that to an indefinite period will weigh down the laboring men of this nation, cripple our energies, and bring upon us the oppression, the suffering, which now render the English peasantry the subjects of pity throughout the civilized world. The Compromise is but the incipient step to this final consummation. If we are now willing to subject the funds of the nation to sustain this institution, if we silently submit to this Compromise, I assert, without hesitation, that a proposition to relieve ourselves from this burden, by the purchase of the slaves of the nation, will be made within the next five years. I therefore say to the laboring men of the North, of all parties, your constitutional rights, your liberties, are in danger. To pay \$1,200,000,000 would, however, be far less degrading to the Northern character than this fugitive law.

Sir, gentlemen here strive to get up old party issues. Who does not know that those issues have become obsolete; that they cannot be galvanized into life? Who now contends for a National Bank? Who opposes the sub-treasury? These issues have been surrendered by the Whigs. The Democratic party no longer contends against harbor and river improvements. There will be no more proceeds of the

public lands to divide among the States. There is no longer any issue of principle in regard to the tariff. The Whigs ask no more, than that the revenue to sustain Government shall be raised by a tariff of duties, so adjusted as best to promote the interests of our own labor. To this the whole Democratic party of the North assent. There is no longer any party who goes for free trade—for supporting Government by direct taxation. I would myself be willing to try this method, as it would soon abolish the slavery of the South; but no political party is in favor of that system; all agree upon the principles of a tariff, but differ as to the amount which shall be assessed on various articles.

Why, sir, for three years the parties have been unable to arrange themselves upon any issue, whether it be the tariff, or any other of the old questions which divided Whigs and Democrats. Nor can those issues ever again become interesting. They have become obsolete by force of circumstances. While these issues have been fading away, the great and overshadowing questions of humanity have been increasing, strengthening, and extending throughout the nation. It has entered into all our moral and political questions. It is discussed in our social circles, our political conventions, and our pulpits. It controls our county and State elections, our elections of members of Congress, and our Presidential elections. It occupies the attention of our State Legislatures and of Congress. Europe sympathizes with us in this great work. The question of a man's right to his life and liberty now occupies the attention of the civilized world. It has thrown Europe into commotion. Her people, her statesmen, are discussing it. It has taken an undying grasp upon the conscience, the judgment of this people. The agitation will go on, until this Government shall be redeemed and regenerated from oppression, until the stain of slavery shall be wiped from our national escutcheon.

Let me assure gentlemen that a noble band of patriots, of philanthropists, are now laboring to bring about this "consummation so devoutly to be wished." Upon the broad basis of truth, of justice, of equal rights, of the brotherhood of man and of nations, we have taken our stand. Our numbers are increasing. The effects of our labors are becoming manifest. Our cause is advancing. Our moral and political influence is extending, and our final triumph is certain. We have no hostility to any party. Our contest is waged against oppression in all its forms—against tyranny, and usurpation. Nor will we cease our warfare, until victory, rendered glorious by results that will reach forward to man's remotest existence, shall crown our toils—

[Here the hammer fell.]